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SUBJECT: USTICA CRASH BACK IN THE HEADLINES

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR THOMAS
COUNTRYMAN FOR REASONS 1.5(B)(D)

1. (U) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST. EMBASSY REQUESTS THAT DOCUMENTS DESCRIBED BELOW, WHICH WERE RELEASED PURSUANT TO THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT, BE FORWARDED TO POST AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE. SEE PARA 4.

2. (U) MOST MAJOR ITALIAN SUNDAY NEWSPAPERS CARRIED A SPECIAL REPORT AIRED ON STATE BROADCASTER RAI-TG3 ON JUNE 21 ALLEGING "NEW REVELATIONS" ABOUT THE 1980 CRASH OF AN ITALIAN AIRLINER OFF THE ISLAND OF USTICA IN WHICH 81 PEOPLE DIED. UNDER THE HEADLINE, "USTICA: U.S. SPIED ON AMATO," LA REPUBBLICA'S FRONT PAGE ARTICLE CHARGED THE U.S. WITH INTERCEPTING A 1992 PHONE CALL BETWEEN THEN PRIME MINISTER GIULIANO AMATO AND DEFENSE MINISTER SALVO ANDO' (BOTH SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS) IN CONNECTION WITH USG EFFORTS TO MONITOR COURT AND PARLIAMENTARY PROBES INTO THE USTICA ACCIDENT. THE ARTICLES INDICATE THAT THE U.S. AMBASSADOR USED THE INTERCEPTED INFORMATION TO PRESSURE BETTINO CRAXI, LEADER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY, OVER THE GOI'S DECISION TO BE A PLAINTIFF IN A TRIAL RELATED TO THE CRASH.

3. (U) THE LA REPUBBLICA ARTICLE, WHICH WAS ONE OF THE MORE EXTENSIVE PIECES, INCLUDES AN INTERVIEW WITH FORMER PM AMATO. HE DESCRIBED THE 1992 PHONE CALL AS ONLY A DISCUSSION OF THE FACTS, AND SAID THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT HAD NOTHING TO HIDE. OTHER MAJOR ITALIAN PAPERS ALSO CARRIED THE STORY PROMINENTLY ON JUNE 22. THE REPORT OF THE ALLEGED 1992 WIRE-TAP WAS BASED ON DOCUMENTS RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AT THE REQUEST OF USTICA VICTIMS' RELATIVES.

4. (C) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST. THE USTICA CRASH AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES ABOUT A POSSIBLE USG ROLE ARE PERENNIAL FAVORITES OF THE ITALIAN MEDIA. WHILE THE 1992 WIRE-TAP STORY HAS ONLY LASTED THROUGH ONE NEWS CYCLE, WE CAN CONFIDENTLY PREDICT USTICA WILL BE BACK IN THE NEWS IN SOME FORM IN THE FUTURE. IN THE INTEREST OF BEING PREPARED TO RESPOND TO AND LIMIT THE SPIN CONSPIRACY-THEORISTS ATTACH TO NEW "REVELATIONS" ABOUT THE ACCIDENT, POST REQUESTS A COPY OF THE DECLASSIFIED 1992 TELEPHONE INTERCEPT. GRAPHICS FOR THE LA REPUBBLICA ARTICLE SHOWED A BLURRED AND INDECIPHERABLE PHOTO OF WHAT LOOKS LIKE A STATE DEPARTMENT CABLE. ANOTHER ARTICLE REFERS TO A RESTRICTED CABLE SENT IN 1992 FROM AMBASSADOR SECCHIA TO THEN DEFENSE SECRETARY CHENEY. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHERE THE MESSAGE ORIGINATED OR WHETHER IT WAS SENT NODIS OR EXDIS. END COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST.
SEMBLER

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